

3 Groups Ask Access to Cuts Sought in Iran-Contra Report

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A special three-judge panel was asked yesterday to make public sealed motions filed a month ago that seek deletions in independent counsel Lawrence E. Walsh's final report on his seven-year investigation into the Iran-contra affair.

A handful of individuals mentioned critically in the report have filed sealed motions that comment on the report and request that certain portions be deleted, according to sources familiar with the legal maneuvering.

Among the attorneys who have filed such motions, sources said, are those representing former president Ronald Reagan and Oliver L. North, the former Reagan aide who is seeking the Republican nomination for the Senate in Virginia.

Under the independent counsel law, those mentioned critically in the report can submit comments that are to be published when the report is released. On Dec. 1, the three-judge panel ordered Walsh to prepare a special volume of the comments to be released with his report.

However, in an added twist, some persons have asked the panel to keep their comments from Walsh until there is a ruling determining whether material they consider offensive is removed before the report is made public.

"They don't want to comment on something in a submission sent to Walsh if the statement is taken out of the report as approved by the judges," was the way one lawyer described the situation.

In yesterday's emergency motion, the Society of Professional Journalists, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of

the Press and the National Security Archive asked the panel to unseal motions "requesting suppression, redaction or deletion of any portion" of Walsh's final report.

The organizations said the secret filings "undermine public confidence in the

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judicial process, deepen public skepticism about the handling of the Iran-contra affair, and deny the public its cherished right to know what occurs in its courts."

One lawyer involved in the case noted that it was the panel of judges that instructed participants to seal their motions.

The journalists' motion also points out another unusual aspect of the situation: that "some of these secret petitions apparently were never even served on the Office of the Independent Counsel." That apparently has left Walsh in the dark about some of what is going on. The independent counsel, from his home in Oklahoma City, refused yesterday to comment on the matter citing the special court panel's order for secrecy.

On Dec. 3, the three appellate judges ruled that the report would be released after a "slight delay" during which they would review requests for deletions based on fairness and federal grand jury secrecy rules.